



HOW TO...

Blend image layers

You can enhance images by merging layers of tone. Adam Banks explains how to use blending ranges to manipulate tones to stunning effect

If you're familiar with a photo-editing program, you've probably used layers to combine images. By default, the top layer hides those beneath, except in transparent areas. This can be changed by altering the layer's opacity and blending mode.

In Multiply mode, for example, you see the sum of the colour in the top layer and the underlying layer. Each layer added darkens the artwork's appearance, as if you put two slides in a slide projector at the same time. Lots of other blending modes are available, such as Screen, which combines two layers as if they were projected from two slide projectors on the same screen.

Blending modes make it easy to produce impressive effects. For example, if you scan a line drawing done in dark ink on light-coloured paper, you can add it as a layer on top of another image and set the blending mode to Multiply, and the underlying image will show through as if printed on the paper, with the drawing appearing on top.

By experimenting with blending modes and swapping the order of the layers, you'll see some inspiring effects. Advanced image editors such as Photoshop and Paint Shop Pro offer an extra facility known as blending ranges. This allows you to control the range of tones between pure black and pure white that will show through.

We used Paint Shop Pro 9 here, but you can also use version 8. You'll find all the image files on your cover disc. If you have Photoshop then Blending Options, which is available from the menu on the Layers palette, works the same way, only the sliders are presented differently. Hold the Alt key to drag the inner segments, which are like the

upper sliders in Paint Shop Pro. Blend ranges are not supported in Photoshop Elements.

1 Open the Window.jpg file. This is a photo of a window taken at night, so the panes appear black. Then open Landscape.jpg, the view we want to see through the window. Select this whole image by typing Ctrl-A or clicking Select All from the Selections menu and type Ctrl-C to copy it. Click back on Window.jpg and go to Edit, Paste, Paste As New Layer, or press Ctrl-L.

Open the Layers palette using View, Palettes, Layers, or press F8. The window image is in the Background layer, with the landscape on top, labelled Raster 1. To swap them, right-click the Background layer and choose Promote Background. This turns the Background into a normal layer, Raster 2. Click it and drag it to the top of the list.

2 The blending mode of each layer is shown to the right of its name in the Layers palette, and is set to Normal by default. You might need to make the Layer palette a little wider to see this. Click Normal for the top layer and try the other modes. You'll get some interesting effects, such as a landscape-painted window frame, but not the result required. Set it back to Normal.

3 Right-click the top layer's name (Raster 2) and choose Properties from the menu that appears. Click the Blend Ranges tab. This shows two scales, This Layer and Underlying Layer, with a slider at each end, split into upper and lower halves. Drag the top-left slider to the right,



BLEND RANGES AT A GLANCE

- Blend ranges provide a way to make parts of a layer transparent, revealing the layers below.
- Adjusting the This Layer sliders will make the light or dark parts of the selected layer transparent. Adjusting the Underlying Layer sliders makes the selected layer transparent where the layers below are light or dark.
- There are two sliders for each setting. You can gradually fade the layer from visible to transparent as it gets lighter or darker. This gives a subtler result than a sudden cut-off point.

cutting out dark areas of the top layer and allowing the landscape to show through. Make sure the Auto Proof button is selected so you can see the effect immediately. For smooth edges, drag the slider as far as possible without the landscape bleeding into parts of the window frame. Click OK.

4 Open Sky.jpg, and copy this file into the Window.jpg document using Select All, Copy, Paste As Layer, as in Step 1. In the Layers palette, drag its layer (Raster 3) to the middle, between the window and landscape.

5 Right-click this new layer, choose Properties and go to Blend Ranges. On the Underlying Layer scale, drag the top-left slider to the right, then drag the bottom-left slider along as well, to make the relatively dark landscape at the bottom show through the new sky. Leave a gap between the two to make a smooth transition.

6 Fine-tune the mix by adjusting the slider settings for This Layer. Drag the top right-hand slider towards the left to allow the original sky to show through the lightest clouds.

